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SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [MP](#)

SUBJECT: MAURITIUS SCENESETTER - UPCOMING VISIT OF GENERAL WILLIAM
[E. WARD](#)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Embassy Mauritius warmly welcomes AFRICOM Commander General Ward and his delegation to Mauritius, a diverse democracy currently led by Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam. The USG enjoys excellent bilateral relations with Mauritius, including strong cooperation on security issues and participation in USG military training programs. Mauritius' sovereignty claim over the Chagos Archipelago, which includes Diego Garcia, is a sensitive issue that is often raised by interlocutors. As one of the strongest economies in Africa, Mauritius actively pursues increased trade with the U.S. END SUMMARY.

COUNTRY BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Republic of Mauritius is a multi-ethnic, democratic archipelago of 1.2 million people. The population are for the most part of Indian, African, Chinese and European descent. English is the administrative language; however, French and Creole are widely used in daily interaction. The head of state is President Anerood Jugnauth. The head of government and real power is Prime Minister Navin Ramgoolam, who was elected in 2005 for a five-year term. Mauritius is Africa's most successful example of economic development, moving from a per capita income of about \$200 at independence in 1968 to over \$6,300 in 2007. Peaceful transfers of power after credible elections have been the rule here since independence was won in 1968.

U.S. - MAURITIUS BILATERAL RELATIONS

[1](#)3. (SBU) The USG enjoys excellent bilateral relations with the Government of Mauritius (GOM). Embassy officials regularly engage the government on security issues, trade promotion, human rights, counterterrorism, and law enforcement and military training. The Embassy's Public Diplomacy section frequently hosts digital video conferences and speakers on a variety of topics including non-violence in the Muslim communities, conflict resolution and peace building, the role of the media in a democracy, and diversity issues. In 2008, the U.S. Department of the Treasury launched a program with Mauritius' Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) to increase ICAC's capacity to identify, investigate, and prosecute corruption and related financial crimes, including money laundering.

[1](#)4. (U) The U.S. Defense Representative for Mauritius is Commander John E. Ries, based out of U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo, Madagascar.

DATT is responsible for security assistance programs to Mauritius, which focus on coastal security through International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to support the Mauritius Coast Guard. Since 2007 the Mauritius Government has provided a Liaison Officer from the Mauritius Special Mobile Forces to the staff of CJTF-HOA at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti.

SECURITY ISSUES

¶5. (SBU) All Mauritian Security forces are under the command of Police Commissioner Dhun Ishwar Rampersad, who reports to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has the Defense portfolio. The 11,000 strong force includes the National Police, the paramilitary Special Mobile Force (SMF) and the National Coast Guard. The Mauritian Coast Guard is primarily tasked with maritime law enforcement through policing the ports, harbors and coastline of Mauritius, as well as providing search and rescue at sea. The Coast Guard is led by an Indian Naval Commander and several Indian Naval officers. A small yet professional organization, the Coast Guard mission includes the fight against smuggling and terrorism - which supports U.S. DoD goals of helping friends and allies to strengthen their regional maritime security capabilities in the war against terrorism. On July 22, Post attended an inter-ministerial meeting chaired by Permanent Secretary (PS) Doreen Fong Weng-Poorun of the Prime Minister's Office, where she said that combating piracy is a priority on the GOM's agenda. The meeting, an initiative of the British High Commissioner, included a French Embassy representative as well.

¶6. (SBU) Mauritian officials have expressed rhetorical support for participation in Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) that has not yet translated into action. Although its highly-trained, well equipped, bilingual security forces are ideal for police peacekeeping operations (PKO), Mauritius has limited participation in PKOs. Nonetheless, the USG has trained over 100 Mauritian personnel for peacekeeping operations since 2003.

¶7. (SBU) The announcement of a U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) was well-received by Mauritian leaders. Former Mauritian Ambassador to the U.S. Kailash Ruhee actively engaged in meetings at the National Defense University regarding the establishment of AFRICOM. Ruhee is currently the Chief of Staff of the Prime Minister. Although the GOM has expressed interest in AFRICOM numerous times at various levels, its end commitment to AFRICOM is likely to be influenced by the level of support it receives from other African nations.

¶8. (SBU) The Embassy enjoys a close relationship with the Mauritius Police Force and other law enforcement and security organizations due in large part to U.S. sponsored training programs that have successfully taught hundreds of officers in various fields of expertise. The majority of these programs are offered through the Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security Anti-Terrorism Assistance program. Training courses are offered in the United States, in Mauritius, or at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Gaborone, Botswana. The Embassy openly shares most law enforcement information with the GOM and is in return kept informed of any developments that could affect our security.

¶9. (U) The U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) courses and Mobile Training Teams aim to improve Mauritian maritime capabilities. The primary goal is boosting their ability to control the Mauritian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) through surveillance, detection, and enforcement which will in turn reduce economic losses from illegal fishing and help protect Mauritius from terrorism and criminal activity. Mauritian paramilitary personnel have also received peacekeeping training through IMET.

¶10. (SBU) There are some small anti-U.S. groups on the island that have held peaceful demonstrations in the past. The last anti-American demonstration outside the Embassy took place in April 2006. The Muslim community in Mauritius (about 15 percent of the population) has reacted relatively calmly to world events in the past few years that sparked violent anti-U.S. or anti-Western demonstrations in some other countries. The GOM is a partner in the struggle against extremism, but tends to be discreet about it to

avoid stirring up domestic cultural and religious issues.

CHAGOS SOVEREIGNTY CLAIM AND DIEGO GARCIA

¶11. (SBU) The Government of Mauritius sovereignty claim over the British-controlled Chagos Archipelago, which includes a strategic U.S. military base on Diego Garcia, is a long-standing dispute which has not negatively affected bilateral relations. In a radio interview in early 2007, President Jugnauth stated that Mauritius would be willing to withdraw from the Commonwealth to pursue its sovereignty claim. However, the Prime Minister quickly clarified that this was not the official government stance.

CHAGOSSIAN QUEST TO RETURN

¶12. (SBU) Most of the Chagossians who inhabited the archipelago were relocated to Mauritius. These former inhabitants continue their quest to return to the island through legal channels. The Mauritian media and government are publicly sympathetic to the plight of the Chagossians, but some have privately expressed doubt about the strength of the Chagossians' intention to return. While the USG has an interest in these matters, they are bilateral issues between Mauritius and the UK.

POLITICAL ISSUES

¶13. (SBU) Mauritius is a parliamentary democracy governed by a Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, and a National Assembly. The country has enjoyed political stability since independence in 1968.

Despite its strong and vibrant multiparty democracy, the ethnically-based political party competition tends to exacerbates social tensions. Politics and political campaigns are based heavily on appeals to ethnic and religious sentiment rather than policy or ideology. A March 2007 court decision that prohibited a mosque from using loudspeakers for calls to prayer resulted in highly-charged threats of large protests by some local Muslim leaders. However, in Mauritian fashion, the matter was settled through a local compromise calling for quieter loudspeakers.

¶14. (SBU) Mauritius' strong democratic institutions and positive human rights record make it an ideal candidate for leadership in international organizations. In 2009, Mauritius was re-elected for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. Although Mauritius generally concurs with U.S. views, it is often reluctant to commit to a position different from that of the African Bloc.

ECONOMY

¶15. (U) Mauritius has realized a remarkable economic transformation from a mono-crop economy based on sugar production to a diversified economy resting on export-oriented manufacturing (mainly textiles), tourism, and financial and business services sectors. In recent years, Information and Communication Technology, Hospitality and Property Development, the Seafood and Marine Industry, and the Biomedical Industry have emerged, attracting substantial investment from both local and foreign investors. GDP growth reached 5.3 percent in 2008, but is expected to slow down to 2.3 percent in 2009 as a result of the global economic downturn. Although tourism and textiles have contracted significantly, some other sectors, such as agriculture, manufacturing (other than textiles), transport and communication, and financial services are still doing well.

¶16. (U) On September 18, 2006, the United States and Mauritius signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), whose main objective is to strengthen and expand trade and investment relations between the two countries. Under the TIFA, a United States-Mauritius Trade and Investment Council has been formed to address a wide range of issues that include trade promotion and development, export diversification, trade capacity building,

intellectual property, labor, investment, and environmental issues. Mauritius hosted the Third TIFA Council Meeting on April 21-22, 2009. On August 5, in a special ceremony at the 8th AGOA Forum held in Nairobi, Kenya, U.S. Secretary of State Clinton, U.S. Trade Representative Kirk, and Mauritius Minister of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade Dr. Arvin Boolell announced the launch of formal negotiations for a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with Mauritius. The conclusion of a BIT will provide a legal framework that should further encourage investment flows between the United States and Mauritius.

¶17. (U) Mauritius benefits from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which allows more than 6,400 items to enter the U.S. duty free. Mauritian exports to the U.S. under AGOA focus primarily on the textile and apparel sector, though both governments are encouraging diversification into other areas. In October 2008, Mauritius was granted the third-country fabric exemption (aka the "derogation"), which allows Mauritian-manufactured clothing made from fabric originating anywhere in the world duty-free access to the U.S. market.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

¶18. (SBU) Mauritius's closest bilateral partner is India. Ties consisted mostly of cultural exchanges until the 1990s when India imposed a stronger commercial aspect to the relationship. In the past few years, Indian companies have invested in the hotel, financial, information and communications technology, telecommunications, health, oil storage and distribution, beverages, and education sectors in Mauritius. Prime Minister Ramgoolam and other high-level Mauritian officials make frequent trips to New Delhi, and Indian President Kalam visited Mauritius in March 2006. High-profile Indian assistance to Mauritius included construction of the Cyber Tower and the Swami Vivekananda Conference Center. The Mauritian Coast Guard is led by Indian Naval Commander Vishal Singh Kanwar. Recently, an Indian Naval vessel visited Mauritius and

Rodrigues to conduct hydrographic surveys of the ports and greater sea floors in Mauritian territorial waters.

¶19. (SBU) France, the original colonial power in Mauritius, has the next most important bilateral relationship. It focuses on commercial, political, and cultural aspects. Ties with the UK (colonial power 1815-1968), South Africa, and the U.S. are also important. During the Chinese President's visit on February 16 and 17, China and Mauritius signed a funding agreement amounting to USD 281 million that will go mainly towards the extension of the airport terminal. From January-September 2008, Mauritius imported \$ 330 million worth of goods from China, which represents 11 percent of total Mauritian imports, making China the second largest source (after India) of imports for Mauritius. Mauritius is one of the major investors in Madagascar, and as such has been reluctant to condemn the High Transitional Authority led by Andry Rajoelina. The GOM participates in regional discussions regarding the situation in Madagascar.

BLASER